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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether the Third World received less photographic coverage than more developed Western countries and whether this coverage was apt to be more sensational than that accorded more developed Western countries. Also examined was what kind of photo coverage Eastern nations received in the United States press. All photographs on the front pages of four prestige newspapers--"The New York Times," "Chicago Tribune," "Washington Post," and "Los Angeles Times"--during all weekdays of 1986 were analyzed. Of the 3,403 photographs identified, 1,374 (40%) were coded as international. The New York, Washington, and Los Angeles papers devoted about 46% of their photographic coverage to international topics, while the "Chicago Tribune" devoted only 30% of its coverage to international topics. Although Western nations received the most photo coverage, the Third World was also well represented; Eastern nations' coverage was far below that of Western nations or the Third World. Qualitatively, however, the East was covered in a much better balanced way than was the Third World. Of the 924 photos coded as Third World, 682 (73.9%) were sensational in nature. The greatest percentage of photos from the Third World was found in the military/war sub-category. For the West and the East, only about 50% of the total units were coded as sensational. Use of dominant photographs (three columns or more) in the sensational category was also high. Findings suggest that more research is needed to see how Americans perceive the Third World and to what extent photographs might influence those perceptions. (NKA)

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THIRD WORLD PHOTO COVERAGE IN FOUR PRESTIGE U.S. NEWSPAPERS

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Although several empirical studies have analyzed U.S. press coverage of the Third World, none have considered photographic coverage. The following research will begin to take a scientific look at that largely unexplored area. For many reasons, photos and their accompanying captions have become an integral part of most newpapers' daily presentations. Faster films, faster lenses, satelite transmission, better press reproduction, better transportation for shuttling photojournalists to different areas of the world and most recently electronic still photography have helped facilitate the wide and varied use of photographs in the daily press.

For more than three decades, researchers have investigated U.S. press coverage of Third World countries. Early studies suggest that the U.S. press paid very little attention to the Third World in the 1960s and 1970s (3,5). For example, Markham found that with the exception of the New York *Times*, major South American newspapers published more foreign news than major United States newspapers. This was true despite having only about half the total newshole of United States newspapers (5).

More recent studies note increased coverage, but find that a disproportionately large amount of the coverage is crisis and conflict oriented. Weaver and Wilhoit in a 1979 study and again in 1981 found that small to medium circulation U.S. newspapers present a distorted view of the Third World; one that emphasizes conflict (13,14). Potter in 1987 concluded that Third World news coverage in eight U.S. "prestige" newspapers; the New York *Times*, Washington *Post*, Chicago *Tribune*, St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, Atlanta *Constitution*, Miami *Herald*, Los Angeles *Times and Christian Science Monitor*, was much more likely to be sensational than Western news coverage. And, Rosenblum, in Coups and Earthquakes,(8) cites several problems with Western press coverage of the Third World.

Questions about U.S. press coverage of the Third World will likely

continue, but an important element of today's newspaper which has been overlooked in this argument is the photograph and its accompanying caption. All subsequent references to photographs will, without specifically stating it, refer to the caption as well.

Recently, newspaper photographs have begun to receive some attention in empirical studies. Wanta tested the use of photos in the agenda setting role. In administering pretests and posttests to three independent groups, Wanta found that the use of photographs in newspapers has a significant effect on what people think are salient issues. Furthermore, he concluded that a dominant photograph may be more powerful in agenda setting than smaller photos (12).

In another recent study, Nir analyzed the early photographs of the Holy Land. Dividing the 19th century photographers into two groups, French and English, Nir concluded that cultural predispositions play a significant role in the photographer's selection of subject and perspective (6).

Photographic studies such as these may ultimately be used in researching photo coverage of the Third World by the U.S. press. But, other more basic information about the use of photographs must first be obtained. Does the Third World receive less photographic coverage than the West? Is the photographic coverage of the Third World much more likely to be sensational than Western photographic coverage? How much and what kind of photo coverage do Eastern nations get from the U.S. press? These are the questions this study attempts to answer.

What kinds of answers should we expect? We would expect editorial decisions for photographs to be very similar to editorial decisions for news stories at any given newspaper. Therefore, my hypotheses are the following: International news photographs will constitute between 40% and 50% of the total number of news photographs on the front pages of the

newspapers in the study. There will be significantly more photo coverage of the Western countries than either Third World or Eastern countries. Photo coverage of the Third World countries and the Eastern countries will be disproportionately more sensational than that of the Western countries. And, photo coverage of Third World and Eastern countries will be disproportionately more sensational than U.S. national, state and local photo coverage.

My sample was selected from four newspapers that are among the nation's prestige press, the New York *Times*, Chicago *Tribune*, Washington *Post*, and the Los Angeles *Times*. These four newspapers were chosen because they have large circulations, each is highly regarded journalistically, and geographically they represent a good balance across the country (2,7,9).

Largely imitative of the Potter study (7), the coding included the following information: name of newspaper, level of news photograph, and type of news photograph. The level of news photograph included International News or U.S news. If the photograph was International, it was further coded as being West, East or Third World. The West was defined as an industrialized non-communist country including the U.S., Canada, Western Europe, Israel, Greece, Japan, Australia and South Africa. Eastern countries included the U.S.S.R., the Soviet Bloc and China. Third World countries included all of South and Central America, Africa (except South Africa), Asia (except China and Japan) and Oceania (except Australia). Photos involving the U.S. were coded International news only if they included information from another country as well.

Also, it is important to note that a photograph could be coded as belonging to more than one level. For example, a photograph of a destroyed auto where a Western diplomat was killed by Third World terrorists was coded as Military/War in both the West and Third World categories. In

addition any photograph of the Pope or the Vatican was coded as West.

This study, like Potter's, adapted the content categorization developed by Burgoon, Burgoon and Wilkinson (2). The categories were government, sensational, business, science/technology, and popular. The government category refered to photographs involving the normal workings of a government, the executives, legislators and judges including campaigning for any of these offices. Another subcategory, Royalty, was developed as a result of the pretest.

The sensational news category included four subcategories. They were: natural disasters, accidents, crime and military/war. As a result of the pretest, a fifth subcategory, Protest, was added. This accounted for organized protest that did not fit well under the Military/War category. As Potter points out, this category is very broad. Most, though certainly not all, of the photos coded sensational involved life and death situations such as nuclear plant leaks, earthquakes, terrorist attacks and military coups.

The business category included photographs about particular industries or businesses as well as photos about consumers and laborers. The science/technology category had five subcategories; conservation/environment, energy, space, medicine or other.

Finally, the popular category included feature-type photographs; those kinds of photos that cannot really be included in any of the other categories. Included under the popular category were four subcategories; people features, entertainment/culture, sports and religion.

As in the Potter study, multiple assignment was permitted. For example, a photograph of the Pope blessing a drought victim in Ethiopia had two levels (West and Third World) and was included in two categories (popular-religion and sensational- natural disasters).

One final distinction was made between photographs. All photos that were three columns or more were coded as dominant photographs. All others were coded as non-dominant photos. This would appear to be important information if further experiments support Wanta's hypothesis about dominant photographs.

For a pilot test of categories two composite weeks of front pages from each of the four newspapers were randomly selected from 1985. They included all five weekdays. For the actual study the sample included all photographs on the front pages of the four prestige newspapers during all weekdays of 1986. The front pages were analyzed because the news that appears on the front page is what is perceived as the most important news of the day. The entire year was included to obtain a large enough sample. And, 1986 was selected because it provided the most recent sample to which I had access.

The coders were a graduate student and a Ph.D. student in the journalism department at the University of Texas. Coder reliability was 74%. The 74% figure should be very sufficient because there were 26 categories and six ways in which a unit could be coded within each category. The most difficulty in coder reliability came between subcategories within the Sensational category. For example, one coder interpreted some photographs as Protest while the other interpreted the same photographs as Military/War.

Of the 3,403 front page photographs identified, 1,374 (40%) were coded as International. The Los Angeles *Times* (47%), New York *Times* (46%) and Washington *Post* (46%) devoted about the same percentage of photographic coverage to International topics, while the Chicago *Tribune* devoted only 30% of their front page photo coverage to International topics.

Within the 1,374 international photos, there were 2,518 units coded. Of these, 345 (13.7%) were coded as Third World only, 408 (16.2%) were coded as West only and 75 (3.0%) were coded as East only. The remaining 746 International photographs were coded as dual (including more than one category and or world orientation). Because of the dual or in some cases multi coding of photographs, the coding units listed in Table 1 sum to a figure greater than the total number of international photographs.

Although the West had the greatest representation, 1,301 (51.6%), the Third World was also well represented, 924 (36.7%). The East's photo coverage 293 (11.7%) was far below that of the West's or Third World's. As illustrated in Table 1, all four newspapers were similar in percentages of photographs devoted to Third World topics. Percentages varied slightly more in the West and East columns, but were still similar among the sampled newspapers.

Although there were differences in quantitive photo coverage between the Third World, West and East, the striking differences were in the different types of photo coverage between the three columns (see Table 2). Of the 924 total units coded as Third World, 682 (73.9%) were sensational in nature. The greatest percentage of photos from the Third World were found in the Military/War subcategory. The West, On the other hand, had 1,301 total coding units, of which 650 (50%) were sensational. The East had 156 (53.2%) of 293 total units coded as sensational.

Well over half (1,488) of the total number of photo units (2,518) were coded as sensational, while the Science/Technology/Health and Business categories accounted for only 35 (1.4%) combined. The Third World had by far the lowest percentage of photos in every category except Sensational.

A record was also kept of the categorization of U.S.- National, State

and Local photos. There were 2,029 total photos under this column, and they were much more qualitatively balanced than the international photographs. There were 529 (26.1%) coded as Government, 534 (26.3%) were coded Sensational, 68 (3.3%) were coded as Science/Technology/ Health and 89 (4.4%) were coded as Business. The largest category, however, was Popular, which had 809 (39.9%) of the photographs in the U.S.-National, State, Local column.

There was also a distinction made between dominant and non-dominant photographs. There were a total of 659 dominant photo units coded as International. This accounted for 26.2% of all coded units in International photos. The percentage of dominant photo units in the Sensational category, 436 (66.2%) was even higher than the percentage of all photo units in the Sensational category. Overall, the qualitative differences between Third World, West and East were about the same for dominant photos as they were for all photos.

In this study, the proportion of international news photographs was about 40%. This is similar to the earlier study of news stories by Potter. He found about 44% of the news stories were international in nature.

The press has been criticized for its lack of Third World coverage. This charge seems to be unfounded in the area of front page photo coverage by the nation's elite press. About 37% of all international photographs coded in the study were about Third World subjects compared to 52% for the West. As in Potter's study, it was clear that the East was substantially underrepresented. Only 11% of all international news photos covered the East. It may be interesting for futher study to find out the reason for such poor representation of the East. Is there a problem with getting photo access in Eastern countries? Is there little interest in the U.S. press? Surely, it's not from lack of subject matter.

Although this study found that there was substantial Third World photo coverage, the type of coverage may be open to criticism. Over 73% of the Third World photo coverage was found to be sensational. What are the implications of this finding? If day after day, American newspaper readers are presented with photographs of the Third World, three quarters of which are sensational, how will they view the Third World?

This study would seem to suggest that more experimental research is needed to see how Americans perceive the Third World and how much photographs might influence those perceptions. Do most Americans see the Third World as conflict and crises ridden with not much else happening? Does the U.S. press support or even initiate that perception by its use of photographs?

Other possible implications arise from the highly sensational photographic coverage of the Third World. For example, how much do American photojournalists' cultural predispositions account for their selection of subjects (6)? Could it be as Nora Ephron wrote in New York magazine: "'working as a war correspondent is almost the only classic male endeaver left that provides physical danger and personal risk without public disapproval and the awful truth is that for correspondents, war is not hell. It is fun (4).'" Her assertion suggests that the type of photojournalist that might cover Third World news would be someone who selects war subjects to the exclusion of other kinds of Third World news.

Another possibility is that the large number of sensational photographs is an editorial decision based on economic factors; giving the audience what it wants. Sood, Stockdale and Rogers found that disaster stories have high audience interest, substantially more than political or human interest stories (11).

An unexpected finding in the study was that the photographic

coverage of the East was qualitatively about the same as the West. The Potter study found that qualitatively, the East was covered in a similar way as the Third World. In this study, however, the East received a very small amount of photo coverage, but the photo coverage that it did receive, was much better balanced than that of the Third World. As with the West, the East had relatively many photographs in the Government category. This gave the impression that both the East and West deal with problems through official and lawful means. The Third World, on the other hand, would seem to take all of its problems to the streets.

The use of dominant photos by a newspaper would seem to place more importance on those photographs. Also, as Wanta (12) found, the readers may place more importance on those photos as well. This study found that the proportionate distribution of dominant photographs was nearly the same as it was for all photographs combined. The percentage of sensational photographs rose slightly for the Third World (79.9%) and the West (57.0%) and remained the same for the East (53.2%). The question would again seem to be for the American newspaper reader, does much else happen in Third World countries besides terrorism and revolution?

Some news media have begun to address the problem of sensational Third World news coverage. In 1987 WETA, the public television station in Washington D.C., aired a documentary on Third World economic development (1). Also in 1987, CNN, the independent news network, began a nightly program that uses taped reports from foreign journalists, many of them Third World journalists (10).

The CNN program may have implications for the future of photo-journalism. As more Third World citizens are trained as photo journalists, a more balanced presentation of Third World news photos may

emerge. For the present, however, there is room for a lot more research in the area of news photography and its relationship to the Third World.

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Third World Photo Coverage in Four Prestige U.S. Newspapers

Table 1

Comparison of Third World, West and East Photo Coverage
in Four Prestige U.S. Daily Newspapers, in Percent

Newspaper	Third World		West		East		Number	N
	Single	Dual	Single	Dual	Single	Dual	of Photos	
New York Times	13.0*	23.4	19.1	34.2	2.8	7.5	46**	713
Chicago Tribune	13.9	21.3	16.9	35.3	3.2	9.4	30	657
Washington Post	15.2	22.8	13.3	35.3	3.7	9.7	46	777
Los Angeles Times	11.6	25.6	15.6	38.6	1.3	7.3	47	371
Total Coding Units	345 (13.7)	579 (23.0)	408 (16.2)	893 (35.4)	75 (3.0)	218 (8.7)		2518

Chi Square = 27.57 with 15 degrees of freedom, $p<.05$

* Percentages in the cells indicate the proportion of a newspaper's total international photo units coded belonging in that column.

** Percentages in this column refer to the proportion of international news photographs relative to a newspaper's total number of front page photographs.

Table 2

Analysis of Third World, West and East Photographs by type of Photo

Photo Type	Third World		West		East		Coding
	Single	Dual	Single	Dual	Single	Dual	Units
Government							
Executive	104	77	109	237	24	61	612
Legislative	0	1	13	43	1	0	58
Judicial	1	1	0	3	0	1	6
Royalty	0	0	31	3	0	0	34
	184* (19.9%)**		439 (33.7%)		87 (29.7%)		710
Sensational							
Natural Disaster	10	1	1	1	0	1	14
Crime	14	156	35	199	1	50	455
Military/War	77	251	27	228	2	13	598
Accident	13	13	6	18	25	10	85
Protest	109	38	95	40	7	47	336
	682 (73.9%)		650 (50.0%)		156 (53.2%)		1488
Popular							
People Feature	12	17	25	87	6	22	169
Entertain/Culture	2	2	14	8	2	6	34
Sports	0	10	5	11	1	3	30
Religion	1	10	30	11	0	0	52
	54 (5.8%)		191 (14.7%)		40 (13.7%)		285
Science/Technology/ Health							
Conserva./Environ.	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Energy	0	1	1	3	0	2	7
Space	0	0	1	0	3	1	5
Medicine	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Other	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
	2 (0.2%)		9 (0.7%)		6 (2.0%)		17
Business							
Industries/Execs	0	0	11	0	0	0	11
Consumers	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Laborers	1	1	1	0	3	0	6
	2 (0.2%)		12 (0.9%)		4 (1.4%)		18
	924		1301		293		2,518

Chi Square = 147.68 with 8 degrees of freedom, $p < .001$

*Total number of coding units in the block of sub-categories above.

**Percentage of coding units in the block above compared to total number of photos in the column.